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ABSTRACT

Although composition specialists embrace a variety of theoretical frameworks and research methodologies, they share a commitment to protecting the rights, privacy, dignity, and well-being of the students who are involved in their studies. These guidelines from the Conference on College Composition and Communication are intended to assist composition specialists in fulfilling this commitment. The guidelines apply to all efforts by scholars, teachers, administrators, students, and others that are directed toward publication of a book or journal article, presentation at a conference, preparation of a thesis or dissertation, display on a website, or other cultural dissemination of the results of research and scholarship. The guidelines apply to formally planned investigations and to studies that discuss students and student writing that the composition specialists encountered in other ways, such as when teaching classes or working at writing centers. They consider the following elements: compliance with policies, regulations, and laws; maintaining competence; obtaining informed consent; conducting studies involving classes; recruiting the composition specialists' own students; quoting, paraphrasing, and reporting student statements; using videotapes, audiotapes, and photographs; describing students; and using groups of student writing samples collected outside of an institutional review board-approved study. (NKA)

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NCTE Positions and Guidelines
A Professional Association of Educators in English Studies, Literacy, and Language Arts

Guidelines for the Ethical Treatment of Students and Student Writing in Composition Studies

Conference on College Composition and Communication

ED 471 009

Preamble

Inquiry in composition studies often focuses on students and student writing. Although composition specialists embrace a variety of theoretical frameworks and research methodologies, they share a commitment to protecting the rights, privacy, dignity, and well-being of the students who are involved in their studies. These guidelines are intended to assist composition specialists in fulfilling this commitment.

These guidelines apply to all efforts by scholars, teachers, administrators, students, and others that are directed toward publication of a book or journal article, presentation at a conference, preparation of a thesis or dissertation, display on a website, or other general dissemination of the results of research and scholarship. The guidelines apply to formally planned investigations and to studies that discuss students and student writing that the composition specialists encountered in other ways, such as when teaching classes, conducting student conferences, directing academic programs, or working at campus and community writing or literacy centers.

These guidelines do not apply to studies that composition specialists conduct solely for the purpose of improving their own practice or solely for discussion within their own school, school district, college, or university. However, even in the latter types of studies, composition specialists carefully protect the rights, privacy, dignity, and well-being of the students they study. These guidelines suggest ways to accomplish this goal.

Composition specialists are encouraged to seek additional ways beyond those identified in these guidelines to assure that they treat students and student writing ethically.

A. Compliance with policies, regulations, and laws

Composition specialists learn about and comply with all policies, regulations, and laws that apply to their studies. If their work is subject to review by an institutional review board (IRB)(1), they submit their plans for advance review and approval, and they conduct their studies in accordance with the approved research plans. If their studies are subject to an alternative review process at an institution that does not have an IRB, they comply with this process. Composition specialists who believe that their studies are exempt from any regulation or review process contact the appropriate committee or authority for confirmation. If they do not work or study at an

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institution with an IRB or other review process, they contact colleagues at other institutions so they can learn about and follow the procedures IRBs require. Composition specialists who are uncertain whether their institutions have an IRB or alternative review process initiate the inquiries necessary to find out for sure.

When conducting studies that their IRBs determine to be exempt from IRB review, composition specialists follow the applicable provisions of these guidelines.

B. Maintaining competence

Composition specialists assure that they and their assistants are appropriately trained and prepared to conduct the studies they undertake. Training and preparation may include enrollment in courses, study of relevant published research and methodological discussions, and consultation or collaboration with experienced researchers. Composition specialists strive to refine their competence and to keep apprised of the ongoing discussion of best practices in research.

C. Obtaining informed consent

When asking students to volunteer to participate in a study, composition specialists explain the study in a way that enables the potential participants to understand the following points:

1. The purpose of the research and its possible benefits.

2. What students who volunteer will be asked to do and how long it will take.

3. What the composition specialists plan to do with the information or data they obtain from the students.

4. Any potential discomforts or harms the students might incur as a result of participating.

5. Whether or not the composition specialists intend to include information in research reports that would render the participants identifiable. (Composition specialists always honor student requests that reports contain no personally identifiable information including information that would make them identifiable to persons familiar with the research site such as other students in their classes.)

In addition, composition specialists emphasize the following points:

1. Participation is completely voluntary.

2. Students may decline to participate or withdraw from participation without harm to their grade, reduction in the instruction they will receive, or the loss of any other benefit to which they are otherwise entitled.

For studies involving minors, composition specialists obtain permission from a parent or guardian as well as the assent of the minor.

These guidelines concerning informed consent are intended to complement (not replace) any additional requirements by applicable policies, regulations, and laws.

D. Conducting studies involving classes

When conducting studies involving classes, composition specialists give primary consideration to the goals of the course and fair treatment of all students. Toward that end, they take the following measures, whether the students are members of their own classes or are from classes taught by other people:

1. They inform students in advance of the course or at the very beginning if research participation is a requirement so that students may switch to another course if they wish.

2. They assure that volunteering, declining to volunteer, or deciding to withdraw after volunteering will not affect a student's grade.

3. They assure that pursuit of their research goals will not hinder achievement of the course's educational goals.

4. They assure that all students will receive the same attention, instruction, support, and encouragement in the course, whether or not they have volunteered to participate in the composition specialists' study.

5. They assure that reports on the research do not include information about students who did not volunteer.

E. Recruiting the composition specialists' own students

To avoid situations in which students feel that their decision to participate or not to participate in a study might affect their treatment by their instructors, composition specialists recruit student participants from other classes or other sources unless the topic of the research or other special circumstances require that the study involve the composition specialists' own students.

F. Responding to student questions

Composition specialists provide students invited to participate an opportunity to ask questions about the study. When asked questions by participants during or after a study, composition specialists reply in as timely a manner as possible without jeopardizing the integrity of the project.

G. Quoting, paraphrasing, and reporting student statements

In their publications, presentations, and other research reports, composition specialists quote, paraphrase, or otherwise report students' written statements only with the students' permission. When quoting, paraphrasing, or reporting students' spoken statements, composition specialists do so without including the students' names or identifying information unless they have the students' permission to identify

them. When the students are minors, composition specialists obtain the permission of the students' parents or guardians and the assent of the minors. When composition specialists have used a consent process approved by an IRB or similar committee, they have obtained the necessary permission.

Composition specialists report students' written and spoken statements accurately. They interpret the statements in ways that are faithful to the students' intentions, and they provide contextual information that will enable others to understand the statements accurately. When in doubt, composition specialists check the accuracy of their reports and interpretations with the students. They are especially sensitive to the need to check their interpretations when the students are from a cultural, ethnic, or other group different than their own. They always obtain permission to use a statement they believe the student made in confidence with the expectation that it would remain private.

When discussing the students' statements that they quote, paraphrase, or otherwise report, composition specialists do so in ways that are fair and serious and cause no harm.

H. Using videotapes, audiotapes, and photographs

Because videotapes, audiotapes, and photographs allow individual students to be identified, composition specialists obtain permission from all students shown or heard before including the tapes or photographs in conference presentations, publications, or other public displays. When the students are minors, composition specialists obtain the permission of the students' parents or guardians and the assent of the minors. When composition specialists have used a consent process approved by an IRB or similar committee, they have obtained the necessary permission.

I. Describing students

Composition specialists describe individual students and groups of students fairly and accurately, in ways that are accountable to the data, observation, or other evidence on which the descriptions are based. They describe students in ways that are fair and serious, cause no harm, and protect the students' privacy.

J. Using groups of student writing samples collected outside of an IRB-approved study

When they plan systematically to study a group of student writing samples that have been collected outside of a study approved by an IRB or other process (e.g., assignments turned in for a grade, student portfolios submitted as part of a placement program), composition specialists determine whether their planned use of these samples is consistent with the policies governing research at their institutions and, if different, the institution at which the samples were collected.

Note

1. An institutional review board is a committee established under the federal regulation for the protection of research participants (45 CFR 46). Each IRB is legally responsible for assuring that all research involving human participants that is conducted under the aegis of its institution complies with this regulation. For more information, visit the website of the federal Office for Human Research Protections: http://ohrp.osophs.dhhs.gov.

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